



On Deck 7 of the Crystal Cruise Serenity is the intimate 14-seat Vintage dining room. Guests from the Barrington area and Switzerland gather for an unforgettable dining experience. In front, from left: Sharon Clark, Karen Mansfield, Pierette Bettex, Linda Conroy, Kim Jozwiak, and Pat Bryant. Back row, from left: Dr. Tyson Bryant, Gregory Pearson, Dr. James Mansfield, Oskar Reimann, Timothy Horne, Bonnie Horne, James Conroy, Joe Jozwiak and Jim Bryant.

Wine at Sea

ONE OF THE MOST ENJOYABLE WAYS TO learn more about wine and food is to book a cruise on an upscale ship which focuses on wine and food. While many cruise lines have offered fine food and wine for years, the last decade has witnessed further focus in this area. The leading players in this field include Crystal Cruises, Oceania Cruises Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Silverseas Cruises and Windstar Cruises. Smaller but also luxurious alternatives include The Yachts of Seabourne and Sea Dream Yacht Club.

While I have limited experiences with cruises (only three), the last two were over the recent past and made lasting impressions. Both trips were on the Crystal Cruises Serenity, which was recently voted by Condé Nast to have the highest readership rating of any cruise ship, hotel or resort worldwide over the past 17 years. I can verify that it is a truly remarkable vessel and both times I had an 'over the top' experience.

Four years ago I joined the owners of four great

California wineries (Ridge, Chateau Montelena, Joseph Phelps and Silver Oak) on a 13-day cruise in the Mediterranean. We sailed from Venice to Croatia, Majorica, Cannes, Nice, Livorno, Corsica and Rome. While itineraries are important to many, the ship is so fantastic, one is tempted to stay on board at many ports of call. On this cruise I went on only two shore excursions and simply made a cursory walking visit at each other stop. The ship offers so many activities from learning a foreign language (Berlitz) to learning to play the piano (Yamaha) to computer skill classes, that there is simply not enough time to do it all. Of paramount importance if one wants to leave the ship at the end of the cruise wearing the clothes worn upon arrival, is to exercise. A state-of-the-art gym takes away all excuses and an exterior walking track offers an alternative with wonderful vistas.

During the days at sea, the winery presidents poured their wines and talked about them in as much detail as wished. Foods were served to accompany



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.

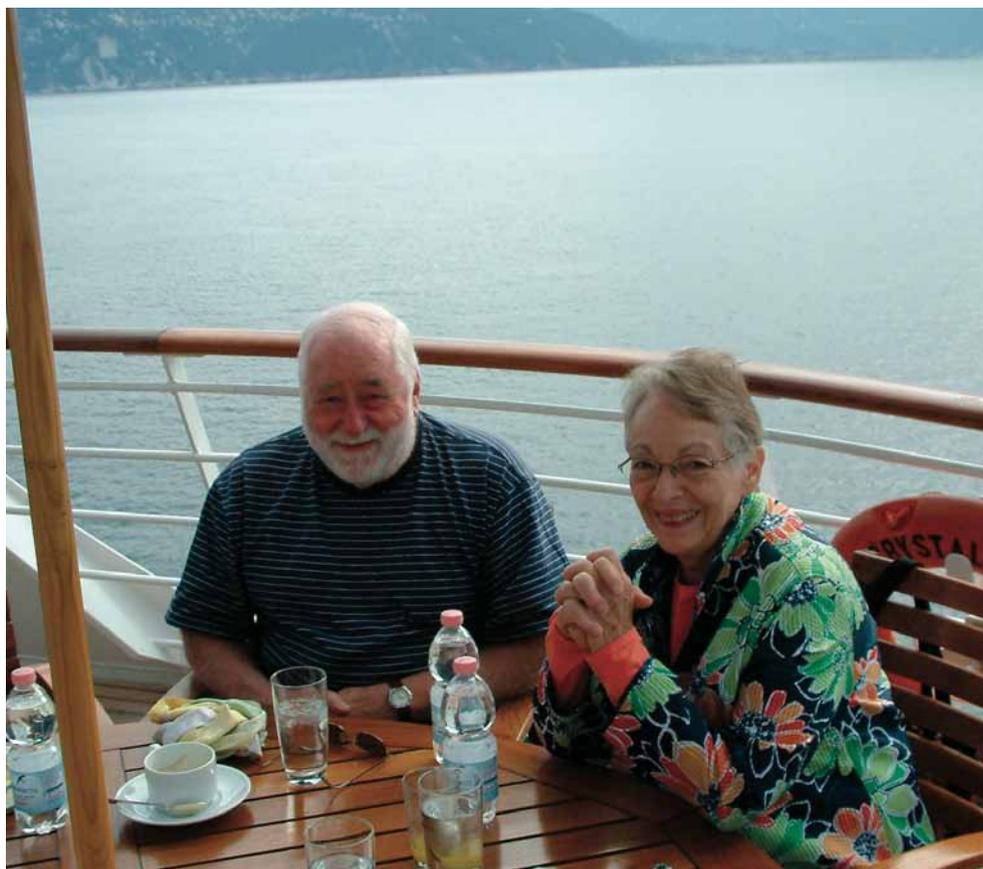
CONTINUED ON 68 →

the wines so one could tell the difference the appropriate foods make. The wineries also served their own wines at two dinners and talked briefly about them with the accompanying food pairings.

Besides the chance to have world class food served in a great ambiance, it is heady to have knowledgeable people share an in-depth understanding of their wine. The food pairings have almost no limit on this ship. It offers superb cuisine in the main dining room as well as the chance to experience Italian specialties in Prego which is under the influence of Pierre Salvaggio, owner of Valentino's which is consistently ranked as the best or one of the best Italian restaurants in the United States. There is a superb Italian wine list in Prego and as in the other restaurants on board, the wines by the glass are offered in six ounce pours at no premium to bottle pricing.

The other specialty restaurant on board is Silk Road, which is associated with the owner of Nobu in New York City and always ranked at the top of Japanese restaurants. There are several signature dishes on the menu and all who visit are extremely impressed. The wine list is very good and as in the case of Prego, any wine from any wine list on board is available by just asking. It should be noted that there is no upcharge for dining at either of the specialty restaurants, so by this measure one can recoup the price of the cruise by dining in these two restaurants each night. An alternative way to justify the price of the cruise is to drink First Growth Bordeaux wines which are priced significantly below current auction prices or retail.

My most recent sailing was in October 2010 which featured locations from Monte Carlo to Portofino, Livorno, Rome, Sorrento, Catena (Sic-



Jim and Pat Bryant

ily), Kuşadası, (Turkey), Mykonos, and Athens. This trip was the result of my reaching out to friends and associates who wished to learn more about wine in a smaller setting. We numbered 17 and had access to the same restaurants noted previously. In addition I wanted to expose all to wines they had not had previously. Working from the wine lists before sailing, I had a good idea of which wines to serve at the two wine tastings on days we were at sea. After meeting with the master

sommelier, we made one substitution and met our goal. With his in-depth knowledge of three of the 10 wines I knew only theoretically and our combined knowledge of the other seven, we were able to increase clients knowledge of these wines, with and without food pairings, and demonstrated the importance of using proper stemware.

The highlight of the food and wine experience was the private dinner in the Vintage Room. I chose one of the suggested menus and then picked the wines to accompany the food. The ship's executive chef worked all day, only for our party and it was close to unbelievable. The room is surrounded by great wines behind glass. To share such ultimate wines paired with perfect food in an intimate setting with friends is not to be missed.

Although we visited only one winery (Sicily) on this trip, depending upon the itinerary, one can visit more and a Mediterranean cruise offers the opportunity to add a pre- or post-visit to one or more winery regions. Considering the response of those who joined me in October, I plan to organize more such trips in the future, starting in September 2011. A Santé! 🍷



Aleš Machač, Crystal Cruises Master Sommelier, and Jim Bryant.